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Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
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AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
USMISSION USUN
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 TEL AVIV 4426

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, IS
SUBJECT: THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT AND ITS CONSTITUENCIES: SOME TENTATIVE VIEWS

SUMMARY: THE PRINCIPAL CONSTITUENCIES OF THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT - SEPHARDIM (JEWS MAINLY FROM MUSLIM LANDS), THE RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES AND YOUTH - ARE LOOKING TO IT FOR STRONG LEADERSHIP, A FIRM FOREIGNPOLICY AND A FRESH APPROACH TO ISRAEL'S PRESSING SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS.THESE GROUPS IN GENERAL ESPOUSE AN ACTIVIST ZIONISM, SUPPORT ISRAELI RETENTION OF THE WEST BANK ON RELGIOUS, HISTORIC AND SECURITY GROUNDS, AND REGARD THE ARABS STATES AS DEEPLY HOSTILE TO ISRAEL AND ZIONISM. BEGIN WILL OFER THEM HIS PROPHETIC VISION, A LEADERSHIP STYLE CLOSE TO THAT OF BEN-GURION, AN ACTIVIST APPROACH
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TO SETTLEMENTS, AND A FIRM LINE ON ARAB-ISRAELI NEGOTIATIONS BASED ON A CALL FOR DIRECT NEGOTIATIONS. WHETHER THE LIKUD APPROACH TO ECONOMIC/SOCIAL ISSUES CAN IMPROVE THE LOT OF THE SEPHARDIM, WHO ARE GENERALLY THE POORER ELEMENTS OF ISRAELI SOCIETY, OR OVERCOME INEQUALITIES REMAINS TO BE SEEN. LIKE THE MEIR AND RABIN GOVERNMENTS, THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT WILL REST ON A

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RELATIVELY SMALL PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY.ITS LONGEVITY
WILL DEPEND, HOWEVER, MORE ON ITS PERFORMANCE THAN ON
ITS NUMERICAL STRENGTH. BEGIN'S HEALTH IS INEVITABLY
ALSO A SIGNIFICANT, UNPREDICTABLE FACTOR. END SUMMARY.

1. A NARROW COALITION. THE NEW ISRAELI GOVERNMENT
WHICH WHICH WILL COME INTO EXISTENCE ON JUNE 20 WILL BE SUP-
PORTED IN THE KNESSET BY 63 MKS FROM THE LIKUD, THE
NATIONAL RELIGIOUS PARTY, THE TWO AGUDAH PARTIES AND
MOSHE DAYAN. IT WILL BE A NARROW COALITION
REPRESENTING THE RIGHT AND THE RELGIOUS PARTIES, WITH-
OUT THE CENTRIST DMC WHICH, AT LEAST FOR THE TIME BEING,
JOINS THE LABOR ALIGNMENT IN THE OPPOSITION. IT IS
WORTH RECALLING THAT, AFTER THE BREAKUP OF THE UNITY
GOVERNMENT IN 1970, THE MEIR AND RABIN GOVERNMENTS
ALSO HAD RELATIVELY NARROW PARLIAMENTARY SUPPORT.IN
PARLIAMENTARY TERMS, THE GOVERNMENT CONTINUES AS LONG
AS IT ENJOYS THE CONFIDENCE OF ITS SUPPORTING PARTIES.

2. OUR TENATIVE JUDGMENT AT THIS STAGE IS THAT -
CONTINGENT ON BEGIN'S HEALTH - THE NEW GOVERNMENT IS
LIKELY TO PROVE DURABLE.IT MAY EVEN PICK UP A FEW
ADDITIONAL SUPPORTERS FROM EITHER THE ALIGNMENT OR THE
DMC IN THE MONTHS AHEAD. WHILE ITS PARLIAMENTARY BASE
IS NOT FULLY HOMOGENEOUS AS REGARDS EITHER FOREIGN OR
DOMESTIC ISSUES, THIS WAS EQUALLY IF NOT MORE TRUE OF
ALIGNMENT-LED COALITIONS, AND IS NOT IN ITSELF A BASIS
FOR ASSUMING THAT THE GOVERNMENT MAY BE SHORT-LIVED.
INDEED, WE BELIEVE THAT PARTICULARLY AT THE OUTSET THE
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NEW GOVERNMENT IS LIKELY TO SHOW CONSIDERABLE PARLIA-M
MENTARY COHESION, PARTLY BECUASE MANY OF ITS MEMBERS
HAVE WAITED SO LONG FOR THIS OPPORTUNITY AND PARTLY
DUE TO THE LACK OF STRONG PERSONALITIES IN THE COALITION
LIKELY TO BE WILLING TO STAND UP PUBLICLY AGAINST BEGIN.
A MAJOR AND UNPREDICABLE FACTOR IN THIS ASSESSMENT OF
COURSE IS BEGIN'S HEALTH; IF HE IS INCAPACITATED OR
SUFFERS A FATAL ATTACK, THE ENTIRE POLITICAL SCENE
WILL BE CHANGED.

3. THE PRESIDENTIAL STYLE IN A PARLAMENTARY SYSTEM.
THE NEW GOVERNMENT PROBABLY WILL BE CLOSER TO THE PATTERN
SET BY BEN-GURION THAN TO THAT OF RABIN, I.E., MORE
PRESIDENTIAL THAN COLLEGIAL. BEGIN WILL BE THE DOMINANT
PERSONALITY, PARTICULARLY AS REGARDS FOREIGN AND SECURITY
AFFAIRS.HE WILL DETERMINE THE MAJOR THEMES OF ISRAELI
FOREIGN POLICY, A PREVIEW OF WHICH WILL BE HIS INTRO-
DUCTORY KNESSET SPEECH ON JUNE 20. DAYAN ALSO CAN BE

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EXPECTED TO PLAY AN IMPORTANT POLICY ROLE, BUT - AT
LEAST FOR THE INITIAL PERIOD - WE BELIEVE HE WILL ACCEPT
AND WORK CAREFULLY WITHIN THE GENERAL FRAMEWORK
ESTABLISHED BY BEGIN. INDEED, DAYAN WILL HAVE LITTLE
CHOICE.HAVING CUTHIMSELF OFF FROM THE ALIGNMENT, HIS
IMMEDIATE FUTURE IS LINKED CLOSELY TO BEGIN.
WE DOUBT THAT WEIZMAN, SHARON OR THE LIBERALS WILL
EITHER TRY OR BE ABLE TO CHALLENGE BEIN'S AUTHORITY,
PARTICULARLY ON KEY FOREIGN AFFIARS AND SECURITY ISSUES.
THEY WILL ACCOMMODATE THEMSELVES TO HIS LEADERSHIP AND
DIRECTION, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME POSITIONING THEMSELVES
FOR THE POWER STRUGGLES AHEAD IF ANYTHING HAPPENS TO HIM.
(SEE SEPTEL FOR A PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT OF THE COALITION
MEMBERS. WE WILL BE PROVIDING A FURTHER ASSESSMENT OF
THE GOVERNMENT'S PROSPECTS AFTER THE HISTADRUT ELECTION
ON JUNE 21).
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4. THE GOVERNMENT'S CONSTITUENCY. WHEREAS THE LABOR ALIGNMENT'S SUPPORT WAS BASED ON THE HISTADRUT, THE KIBBUTZIM, AND THE MIDDLE AND UPPER-MIDDLE CLASSES OF EUROPEAN OR SABRA (NATIVE-BORN) ORIGIN, THE NEW GOVERNMENT WILL DRAW MUCH OF ITS SUPPORT FROM AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT CONSTITUENCY - THE SEPHARDIC COMMUNITY OF ORIENTAL JEWS WHO CAME TO ISRAEL AFTER THE FOUNDING OF THE STATE, PRIMARILY FROM NORTH AFRICA, YEMEN AND IRAQ. IN ADDITION, IT WILL ENJOY THE SUPPORT OF THE RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY AND OF MUCH OF THE YOUNGER GENERATION. INDEED, THE LIKUD VICTORY CAN BE REGARDED AS THE POLITICAL DISTILLATE OF A LONG-TERM DEMOGRAPHIC PROCESS IN WHICH THE SEPHARDIC OMMUNITY HAS COME TO BE THE MAJORITY OF THE ISRAELI POPULATION. IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE DEFECTION OF A LARGE PART OF THE MIDDLE AND UPPER-MIDDLE CLASS FROM THE ALIGNMENT TO THE DMC AND THE FAILURE OF THE ALIGNMENT TO DEVELOP A CONSTITUENCY AMONG ISRAELI YOUTH, THIS DEMOGRAPHIC PROCESS CONSTITUTES IN OUR VIEW A MAJOR FACTOR IN THE ELECTION RESULT AND WILL BE HIGHLY SIGNIFICANT FOR THE FUTURE.

5. THE SEPHARDIC COMMUNITY. LIKUD AND PARTICULARLY HERUT, SUPPORT OVER THE YEARS HAS COME LARGELY FROM THE SEPHARDIC COMMUNITY. THESE JEWS, MAINLY FROM ISLAMIC COUNTRIES, CONSTITUTE THE "OTHER ISRAEL" OF THE POOR AND THE LESS-WELL EDUCATED, OFTEN WITH LARGE FAMILIES. REGARDLESS OF WHAT ALIGNMENT GOVERNMENTS HAVE DONE TO IMPROVE THEIR LOT (FREE EDUCATION, HEALTH INSURANCE, ETCM), THEY HAVE FELT THEMSELVES DEPRIVED OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AND DISCRIMINATED AGAINST BY THE ESTABLISHMENT IN A NUMBER OF WAYS.A KEY FACTOR IN THE LIKUD VICTORY, AS ONE OBSERVER HAS NOTED,IS SIMPLY THAT THERE ARE MORE SEPHARDIC VOTERS (AND FEWER OF THE OLD EUROPEAN GENERATION) THAN BEFORE. WHETHER A LIKUD-LED GOVERNMENT WILL BE ABLE TO ADOPT POLICIES WHICH WILL IMPROVE THEIR SOCIAL/
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ECONOMIC STIUATION REMAINS TO BE SEEN.

6. THE SEPHARDIC COMMUNITY IS CHARACTERIZED BY AN INTENSE NATIONALISM, A TENDENCY TO ARTICULATE A MORE MILITANT AND LESS ACADEMIC ZIONISM, AND A POTENTIAL VOLATILITY GENERALLY ABSENT IN THE SOCIALIST CAMP. IT HAS BEEN FREQUENTLY NOTED THAT IT IS MUCH EASIER FOR THE LIKUD AND GUSH EMUNIM TO GET PEOPLE OUT IN THE STREETS THAN IT IS FOR THE LABOR PARTY OF MAPAM TO DO SO. THE SEPHARDIC COMMUNITY ALSO HAS MUCH STRONGER ATTITUDES TOWARDS ISRAEL'S ARAB NEIGHBORS THAN DO OTHER

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ELEMENTS IN ISRAELI SOCIETY. VIEWING THE WORLD IN
STARK AND ELEMENTAL TERMS,AND RECALLING THEIR OWN
FREQUENTLY BITTER EXPERIENCES IN THEIR COUNTRIES OF
ORIGIN (REGARDLESS OF WHETHER THESE RECOLLECTIONS ARE
EXAGGERATED), THE SEPHARDIM TEND TO SUPPORT A HARD-LINE
APPROACH TO ARAB-ISRAELI NEGOTIATIONS.IN GENERAL, THEY
BELIEVE THAT ARABS ARE INNATELY HOSTILE TO THE STATE OF
ISRAEL AND, EVEN MORE FIRMLY THAN OTHER ELEMNTS OF THE
POPULATION THAT THE ARAB-ISRAELI DISPUTE IS NOT A DIS-
AGREEMENT OVER TERRITORIES BUT A STRUGGLE FOR ISRAEL'S
SURVIVAL AND EXISTENCE

7. THE RELIGIOUS CAMP.THE SITUATION IN THE RELIGIOUS
CAMP IS MORE COMPLICATED AS REGARDS ATTITUDES TO THE
ARABS AND THE ARAB-ISRAELI DISPUTE.THE NRP YOUTH
FACTION AND GUSH EMUNIM ADVOCATE RETENTION OF THE ENTIRE
WEST BANK AND AN ACTIVE SETTLEMENTS POLICY; ON THE OTHER
HAND, A NUMBER OF NRP MODERATES INCLUDING INTERIOR
MIISTER BURG HAVE NEVER REJECTED THE POSSIBILITY OF

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TERRITORIAL COMPROMISE, EVENON THE WEST BANK, AND ARE

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COVERTLY UNENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT GUSH EMUNIM ACTIVISM
AGUDAH YISRAEL ALSO HAS A MODERATE POSITION ON FOREIGN
POLICY AND TERRITORIAL ISSUES, AND HAS OFTEN SUPPORTED
THE LABOR ALIGNMENT ON THESE ISSUES. IT ISPROBABLE,
HOWEVER, THAT THE DOMINANT TONE WITHIN THE RELIGOUS
CAMP IN THE MONTHS AHEAD IS LIKELY TO BE SET BY ITS
MORE MILITANT AND ACTIVIST ELEMENTS.THEY WILL BE
LOOKING TO THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT, FOR INSTANCE, TO
AUTHORIZE NEW SETTLEMENTS ON THE WEST BANK.

8. FIRM LEADERSHIP. THSE GROUPS BELIEVE THAT ISRAEL
NEEDS A STRONG GOVERNMENT TO MEET WHAT THEY PERCEIVE TO
BE THE CHALLENGES LYING AHEAD IN U.S./ISRAEL RELATIONS,
IN POSSIBLE ARAB/ISRAEL NEGOTIATIONS OR IN THE EVENT OF
ANOTHER WAR. THE GOVERNMENT TO SOME EXTENT WILL BE CON-
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DITIOND BY ITS CONSTITUENTS. BEYOND THE PERSONAL PRO-
CLIVITY OF ITS LEADERS TO TAKE A FIRM LINE WILL BE THEIR
NEED TO MAINTAIN CREDIBILITY AND STANDING WITH THEIR
SUPPORTERS. WHILE BEGINDOES NOT WANT A CONFRONTATION
WITH THE U.S., HIS SUPPORTERS ARE COUNTING ON HIM TO GO
TO WASHINGTONTO EXPLAIN THE ISRAELI CASE, NOT TO BE
PERUSADED OF REASONS FOR MODIFYING IT TO MEET THE EXTERNAL
REQUIREMENTS OF OTHER STATES.

9. ECONOMIC/SOCIAL ISSUES. THESE GROUPS ALSO EXPECT THEIR NEW
GOVERNMENT TO TAKE MAJOR REMEDIAL ACTIONON THE DOMESTIC ECONOMIC
AND SOCIAL FRONTS. WE UNDERSTAND THAT BEGINPLANS TO GIVE
EHRLICH, THE FINANCE MINISTER-DESIGNATE, VIRTUALLY A
FREE HAND IN SHAPING ECONOMIC POLICY.EHRLICH, FOR HIS
PART, HAS ALREADY STATED THAT THE POLICY ACTIONS HE HAS
IN MIND ARE VERY CLOSE TO THOSE PROPOSED BYGOVERNOR
GAFNI OF THE BANK OF ISRAEL AND THAT HE ANTICIPATES A
POSITIVE WORKING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HIS MINISTRY AND
THE BANK.HOWEVER, THERE IS SOME SKEPTICISM THAT EHRILCH
WILL HAVE THE FORCE OF PERSONALITY AND POLITICALCLOUT
TO OVERCOME THE INERTIA AND BUILT-IN OBSTACLES TO FAR-
REACHING ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CHANGE OBSERVERS HAVE
BEEN QUICK TO NOTE THAT EHRLICH'S EFFORTS TO REDUCE
GOVERNMENT SPENDING, RESTRAIN WAGE DEMANDS AND PLACE
GREATER STRESS ON THE PRIVATE SECTOR ARE LIKELY TO BE
RESISTED BY THE HERUT WING OF LIKUD, WHICH WILL HAVE THE
INTERESTS OF ITS SEPHARDIC SUPPORTERS TO PROTECT. OVER
THE LONGER TERM, THESE DIFFERING GOALS AND
APPROACHES ARE LIKELY TO CUASE FRICTION
WITHINT THE TOVERNMENT.

10. IMPLICATIONS. WHILE WE CANNOT PREDICT EXACTLY HOW
THE NEW GOVERNMENT WILL ACT, WHAT IS CLEAR ALREADY AT

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THIS STAGE ARE THE ALTERED EXPECTATIONS OF THE ISRAELI
PUBLIC.THE GOVERNMENT'S SUPPORTERS EXPECT IT TO
BE TOUGHER ON THE EXTERNAL FRONT, AND TO ADDRESS
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THE PRESSING SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS IN A FRESH
WAY. THESE ISRAELIS ARE LOOKING FOR A MORE LUCID AND
CLEARER ARTICULATION OF NATIONAL OBJECTIVES. THE NEW
CONSTITUENCY IS LOOKING ABOVE ALL FOR A LEADER WHO
WILL LIFT THE NATION OUT OF ITS MORAL MORASS AND
INFUSE IT WITH A NEW SENSE OF PURPOSE. BEGIN, A MAN
OF FAITH AND PROPHECY, IN MANY WAYS RESPONDS TO THAT
LONGING.THE QUESTION FOR THE U.S. AND ISRAEL'S
NEIGHBORS IS WHEHTER THESE QUALITIES WILL BE TEMPERED
BY POLITICAL REALISM AND SOBRIETY.IN PASSING FROM
LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION TO PRIME MINSTER,BEGIN,I.A.,
HAS TO DECIDE HOW TO RELATE HIS LIFELONG VISION OF THE
JEWISH PEOPLE IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL TO THE RADICALLY
DIFFERENT VIEWS OF THE WEST BANK'S FUTURE AS ARTICULATED
BY THE ARABS. IT IS TOO EARLY TO OFFER A DEFINITIVE
ASSESSMENT, BUT NO ONE - INCLUDING BEGIN HIMSELF -CAN
BE UNAWARE OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CHANGE WHICH WILL
TAKE PLACE ON JUNE 20.
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